

Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Networks

<http://uustatenetworks.org/>

Question sent to both UUA Presidential candidates by the UU State Advocacy Networks (responses listed in alphabetical order):

History shows that state governments initiate many of the innovative laws and programs in America. These programs often lead the federal government towards greater respect for human dignity and the interconnected web of all existence. Thus strong UU interaction with state governments is essential for more effectively bringing UU principles and purposes to our government.

UUs recognized the important role of state governments in strengthening social justice and are responding. A growing UU social justice action network is gathering and focusing UU families' energy on educating state legislatures and advocating UU values in state law and policy. These state networks now exist in 12 states in varying degrees of development. They are vital innovations for raising UU purposes and principles. They merit vigorous development and have received wise and generous support from the UUA, UUSC, the UU Funding Panel and the Veatch Foundation.

Representatives of State Action Networks (UUSAN) met twice in April to share their many challenges and opportunities. They also explored multiplying their effectiveness through 1) collaboration for learning and 2) for organizing high impact coordinated campaigns in several states at once. They are launching a timely, collaborative program mobilizing UU families to educate state and federal governments on the urgent need for strong curbs on global warming.

While the need is obvious and potential high, most state justice networks are still working to build firm foundations. Most are financially challenged and trying to mature rapidly. They are young and need continued support to develop their individual and collective impact.

As you move forward with your candidacy for President we would like to know how the Statewide Advocacy Networks can advance your goals for UU social justice. We would appreciate your response by May 22 so we can share this with our members and supporters.

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman responds:

The Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network (UUSAN) is one of the most exciting social justice movements within Unitarian Universalism, along with the increase in Unitarian Universalist congregations involved in faith-based community organizing groups through organizations like DART, PICO, the Gamaliel Foundation, and the Industrial Areas Foundation. I have been involved with the IAF affiliate, Dallas Area Interfaith (DAI), since before its founding in 1990. My work with Ernesto Cortes was formative in learning about community organizing. I understand that power is organized people and organized money. To the question, "Should the UUA and UU congregations be larger or more powerful?" my answer is more powerful because that will increase our effectiveness in working for justice.

Having worked with DAI from its inception, I am well aware of the challenge of creating viable, effective, and powerful social justice organizations. I am also aware of how critical our religious voice is at the tables of power. While some congregation-based community organizations work on a state-wide basis, many are focused on metropolitan-strategies using direct action to address injustice. UUSAN is vital because of its statewide legislative focus. This is especially urgent given the longstanding and ongoing legislative gridlock at the federal level, which President Obama will surely engage, but may not be able to overcome. Increasingly, we must look to state legislatures for leadership, innovation, hope, and justice. UUSAN has already demonstrated its effectiveness in the work for marriage equality, which is specifically and uniquely state-based.

You ask, "How can UUSAN advance my goals for UU social justice?" As President, I will work with you to advance YOUR goals for UU social justice. I say this because I do not want the UUA to impose an agenda on a unique and vital grassroots effort. Each statewide UU advocacy group has its passion and priorities, and knows where it can and must be most effective in the work for justice. None-the-less, the issues that you are collectively working on are fully aligned with my goals for social justice as President of the UUA. My desire is to collaborate with you to build capacity (strengthening existing statewide groups; encouraging the development of emerging and new groups; sharing best practices; increasing visibility for this work to celebrate the victories and to encourage more individuals and congregations to get involved, including youth and young adults; training and development; etc.) and to increase collaboration with allies, by which I mean The Larger Family (i.e., faith-based community organizing groups, other communities of faith, and nonprofit agencies and community groups that are aligned with UU values). Our Living Faith demands that you and I work together for justice.

As I have said in my platform, I believe in the transformative power of our liberal faith. I am inspired in this work by three qualities that have been the foundation of my life's work: engaged spirituality—a sense of the Holy that demands action for justice in our world; covenantal relationships—connections with others, within and outside our movement, grounded in the promises we make; and faithful stewardship—care and attention to the resources that fuel the work of our movement.

I am also inspired by the collective justice work by UUSAN and look forward to collaborating with you as President of the UUA.

Rev. Peter Morales responds:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond. I believe the mobilization and organization of state networks is an exciting development in our movement. Today we see state governments taking the lead on issues like civil marriage, health care and environmental protection. Our UU voices and those of our progressive interfaith partners need to be heard in state legislatures.

I am personally committed to public witness at the state level. I have personally testified at a legislative hearing in Colorado and have stood, with other clergy, on the steps of the Capitol with our governor as he adopted our language on the immigration debate. I have served as chair of The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado's public policy commission and have served on its board. I have spoken at a press conference denouncing the initiatives of Focus on the Family. My own congregation, Jefferson Unitarian Church, has a

Day at the Legislature each year where members (including children and youth) get a chance to meet with legislators. I spent more than a decade as a newspaper editor and publisher. Speaking out on public issues is in my bones.

We also need to recognize that issues will vary from state to state. For example, although immigration is a major issue in my home state of Colorado, it is probably not as large an issue in Vermont. State networks have the ability to involve members around issues about which they are passionate and where the threat and opportunity are immediate.

If I am elected President of the UUA, public witness will be a top priority. I have emphasized this as one of my four top issues throughout the campaign (along with growing our movement, managing our resources during this economic crisis, and preparing ourselves for a multicultural future). Our state networks have a crucial role to play in all the great moral issues of our time.

One of the challenges we must face together is how to be effective with limited financial resources. As you probably know, the UUA is facing a 15 percent budget cut in the budget year which begins July 1. That translates into about \$4 million in cuts. Because of the way we draw funds from our endowment, the following years are going to be lean, too. I cannot hold out the prospect of significant amounts of money to support State Advocacy Networks. That would be dishonest.

However, I believe there is much we can do together. The UUA needs to work collaboratively with state networks so that we make each other more powerful. I am committed to meeting with state network leaders to explore how we can support each other in ways that are practical and realistic.

I know, from my own work in my congregation, that people care deeply about issues that are local and regional. They are anxious for their religious movement to bear witness for our values of compassion, justice and sustainability. I look forward to the opportunity to work hand in hand with State Advocacy Networks. I am excited by the prospect of what we might do together.

Further information on the UUA Presidential election can be found at:

<http://www.uua.org/aboutus/governance/elections/president/index.shtml>